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 INFO RUHJPG/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 721
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 RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1883
 RUSBAE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 7346
 RUHNSPS/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3251
 RUOMHR/AMEMBASSY TEHRAN 452
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E.O. 12065:GDS 9-4-85 (PLATIN, BRUCE A.) OR-M
 TAGS: PEPR, PINS, MOPS, AF, UR
 SUBJECT: (C) AN ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INFLUENCE
 AND INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

1. (S- ENTIRE TEXT.)

2. SUMMARY: AS THE AFGHAN INSURRECTION HAS
 PROGRESSIVELY SPREAD AND INCREASED IN INTENSITY,
 THE KHALQI REGIME HAS BECOME EVER MORE DEPENDENT
 UPON SOVIET MATERIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ADVISORY SUP-
 PORT. WHETHER THE USSR WILL EVENTUALLY HAVE TO
 COMMIT COMBAT FORCES HERE IS STILL AN OPEN QUEST-
 ION. AS THE USSR HAS INCREASED ITS ANTE IN AFGHA-
 NISTAN, ITS POLITICAL LEVERAGE ON THE KHALQI
 LEADERSHIP HAS ALSO GROWN. FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE,
 THE TWO SIDES, AT THE MOMENT AT LEAST, APPEAR TO
 HAVE DECIDED TO RIDE OUT THE CURRENT STORM TOGETHER.
 END OF SUMMARY.

3. THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN:
 AS THE KHALQI EFFORT AGAINST THE AFGHAN INSURGENCY
 CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE STEADILY, THE NUMBER OF
 SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL IN AFGHANISTAN CONTINUES
 TO RISE. THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 500 SOVIET MILIT-
 ARY ADVISERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WHEN THE KHALQIS
 SEIZED POWER ON APRIL 27-28, 1978. IF THE LARGE
 CONTINGENT AT BAGRAM AIR BASE IS INCLUDED, THE NUMBER
 COULD TODAY BE BETWEEN 3,000 AND 3,500. KHALQI AND
 SOVIET OFFICIALS FREQUENTLY OBSERVE THAT THIS FIGURE
 IS FAR BELOW THE NUMBER OF MILITARY ADVISERS THE US
 HAD IN VIETNAM OR CHINA.

4. SOVIET MILITARY ADVISERS (WHOSE TOTAL OTHER
 THAN THOSE AT BAGRAM AIR FORCE BASE IS BELIEVED TO
 BE SLIGHTLY OVER 2,000) ARE BELIEVED TO BE WITH
 EVERY AFGHAN UNIT DOWN TO BATTALION SIZE. THEY CAN
 ALSO BE FOUND WITH SMALLER SPECIALIZED UNITS, SUCH
 AS RADAR OR COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES. SOVIET PILOTS
 ASSIGNED TO AFGHAN AIR FORCE BASES ARE BELIEVED TO
 FLY COMBAT MISSIONS OCCASIONALLY-- ESPECIALLY THOSE
 INVOLVING THE SOPHISTICATED NEW MI-24 HELICOPTER
 GUNSHIPS. NO PROOF OF THIS (E.G., DEAD SOVIET
 PERSONNEL IN A CRASHED HELICOPTER) HAS BEEN NOTED THUS
 FAR, HOWEVER-- AND THE OCCASIONAL SLOPPY FLYING OF
 MI-24S NOTED BY DAO EXPERTS RECENTLY (E.G., DURING
 THE AUGUST 5 MUTINY AT KABUL'S BALA HISSAR) INDICATE
 THAT AFGHAN PILOTS WERE MOST LIKELY DOING THE FLYING.

5. AIR FORCE BASE BAGRAM, SOUTH OF KANUL, THEIR NUMBERS THERE WE ESTIMATE AT BETWEEN 500 AND 1,360. THIS SITUATION APPEARED TO HAVE DEVELOPED IN A FASHION REMINISCENT OF THE PATTERN OF INCREASING USG INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM. SOVIET PERSONNEL WERE BROUGHT TO BAGRAM TO TRAIN AFGHANS TO USE THEIR NEW AIR WEAPONS. SOVIET MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL WERE ALSO REQUIRED. BECAUSE OF THE THREAT OF NEARBY INSURGENT ACTIVITY, SOVIET FORCES HAD TO BE BROUGHT IN TO PROTECT THE TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE AREAS. THIS THEN LED TO A SOVIET ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PERIMETER DEFENSE OF THE BASE.

6. AS WAS THE CASE DURING THE PRECEDING DACUDEST ERA, SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL ON DUTY IN AFGHANISTAN WEAR REGULAR AFGHAN ARMY AND AIR FORCE UNIFORMS. IN SPITE OF SOME NEWSPAPER STORIES TO THE CONTRARY, MANY SOVIET ADVISERS IN AFGHANISTAN ARE FROM THE EUROPEAN NATIONALITIES OF THE USSR. ONE ONLY RARELY NOTES PERSONNEL FROM THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS OF THE USSR, SUCH AS UZBEKS, TURKOMEN, OR TAJIKS, ALTHOUGH SUCH MEN WOULD CLEARLY BE DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY.

7. SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE BEING KILLED IN AMBUSHES AND IN COMBAT ENGAGEMENTS WITH REBELS, BUT WE HAVE NO FIRM CASUALTY FIGURES. ALTHOUGH THE REBELS WILL EITHER RELEASE AFGHAN SOLDIERS WHOM THEY HAVE CAPTURED--OR MOVE THEM TO HOLDING CAMPS (SOME OF WHICH ARE IN PAKISTAN), THE REBELS ARE BELIEVED TO FOLLOW A PRACTICE OF KILLING ALL THE SOVIETS THEY SEIZE.

8. IT IS DIFFICULT TO MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS THUS FAR OF THE CURRENT SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN. ALTHOUGH THE FLOW OF MILITARY MATERIAL UNDOUBTEDLY OF KEY IMPORTANCE IN KEEPING THE KHALOJ REGIME AFLOAT--AND BRINGING THE TARKI-AMIN LEADERSHIP BADLY NEEDED TIME. THE LATTER HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO HALT THE STEADY EROSION CAUSED BY THE HYDRA-HEADED INSURRECTION THEY FACE. AT SOME POINT, THE CONTINUING HEMORRHAGE OF KHALOJ MILITARY MANPOWER (THROUGH DEATH, DESERTION, AND DEFECTION) MAY REQUIRE THE USSR TO MAKE SOME TOUGH DECISIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO UP ITS ANTE IN THIS STRUGGLE THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF SOVIET COMBAT FORCES. AT THE PRESENT TIME, FOR EXAMPLE, THERE DO NOT APPEAR TO BE ENOUGH TRAINED AFGHAN TANK CREWS TO MAN THE LARGE NUMBER OF TANKS DELIVERED BY THE USSR.

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9. THE SOVIET CIVILIAN PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN: IT IS BELIEVED THAT THERE ARE MANY SOVIET CIVILIAN ADVISERS IN THE COUNTRY, SERVING AT VARIOUS DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND WITH ALMOST ALL AFGHAN MINISTRIES, ALTHOUGH EVEN A BALLPARK FIGURE IS VERY DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH WITH ANY ACCURACY, AS THE INSURRECTION HAS GROWN TO PROPORTIONS WHICH DOMINATE THE PRIMARY ATTENTION OF THE TOP AFGHAN AND SOVIET LEADERSHIP HERE. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CIVILIAN SOVIET ADVISERS HAVE BECOME SOMEWHAT ECLIPSED IN RECENT MONTHS-- PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC INDUSTRIES. FOR SECURITY REASONS, SOVIET CIVILIAN ADVISERS HAVE HAD TO BE REMOVED FROM THE MORE DANGEROUS REGIONS OF REBEL ACTIVITY. THE USSR IS TRYING TO KEEP SOME PROJECTS GOING, HOWEVER, PRINCIPALLY FOR PROPAGANDA EFFECT. THESE PROVINCIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE OPERATIONS HAVE REQUIRED HEAVY AFGHAN MILITARY AND POLICE PROTECTION. BECAUSE MANY MINISTRIES AT KABUL ARE ONLY MARKING TIME AS THEIR SENIOR OFFICIALS ATTEND TO THE "DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION" (SEVERAL MINISTERS AND DEPUTY OF SOVIET ADVISERS IN THOSE MINISTRIES ARE NOT NOW AS HIGHLY VISIBLE AS THEY WERE DURING THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE REVOLUTION, ONE EXCEPTION. HOWEVER, IS THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & CULTURE, WHERE SOVIET PROPAGANDA EXPERTS ARE THROWING THEIR WEIGHT AROUND, ISSUING DIRECT ORDERS IN THE FORM OF "ADVISORY INSTRUCTIONS"---AND REPORTEDLY OFFENDING THEIR AFGHAN COUNTERPARTS.

10. THE SOVIET ECONOMIC INVESTMENT IN AFGHANISTAN: SINCE THE FAMOUS BULGANIN-KHRUSHCHEV VISIT TO KABUL IN 1955, THE USSR HAS POURED APPROXIMATELY ONE BILLION DOLLARS INTO AFGHANISTAN, MOSTLY IN THE FORM OF PROJECTS FINANCED BY LOW-INTEREST LOANS. REPAYMENT HAS BEEN EXTRACTED PARTIALLY THROUGH AFGHAN COMMODITY DELIVERIES, SUCH AS CITRUS FRUITS FROM THE SOVIET IRRIGATION PROJECTS AT JALALABAD OR NATURAL GAS FROM THE CIS-OXUS REGION. AFGHAN AUTHORITIES ASSERT THAT THE USSR HAS ACCDED TO A KHALQI REQUEST FOR DEBT RELIEF. THE EXACT TERMS OF THE SOVIET ACCOMMODATION ARE, AS YET, NOT DEFINITELY KNOWN, ALTHOUGH A SOVIET AID OFFICIAL RECENTLY TOLD EMBASSY MOSCOW (MOSCOW 00152) THAT THE USSR HAD POSTPONED REPAYMENT OF AFGHAN ECONOMIC DEBTS FOR TEN YEARS. THE DELIVERY OF SOVIET MILITARY HARDWARE TO AFGHANISTAN HAS INCREASED GREATLY SINCE THE "GREAT SAUR REVOLUTION." BUT THE TOTAL COSTS INVOLVED--AND THE NEW AFGHAN REPAYMENT COMMITMENTS ARE STILL UNKNOWN. RECENTLY, THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT USSR HAD "ALLOCATED" AROUND ONE AND ONE-HALF BILLION DOLLARS TO SUPPORT THE KHALQI REGIME'S NEW FIVE-YEAR PLAN. A LARGE PORTION OF THIS AMOUNT IS PRESUMABLY COMPRISED OF SOVIET LINES OF CREDIT NOT REPAYED BY THE PREDECESSOR DAUOD REGIME. LIKE OTHER AID DONORS HERE, THE SOVIETS FACE THE FRUSTRATION OF LIMITED ABILITY TO ABSORB AID EFFORTS. FUNDS ALLOCATED ARE NOT ALWAYS EXPENDED.

11. THE POLITICAL STAKE OF THE USSR IN AFGHANISTAN: WHETHER MOSCOW WAS INDEED INVOLVED IN IGNITING THE SAUR REVOLUTION OR NOT--AND BOTH THE KHALQIS AND THE SOVIETS STILL INSIST THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH COORDINATION, THE USSR QUICKLY ASSUMED MAJOR SUPPORT RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE FLEDGLING LEFTIST REGIME AFTER THAT EVENT. AS THE KHALQI LEADERSHIP HAS FOUND ITSELF INCREASINGLY PRESSED BY THE SPREADING AFGHAN INSURGENCY, IT HAS PLACED ITS TRUST COMPLETELY--AND PUBLICLY--IN THE SUPPORT AND PROTECTION OF THE USSR. FOR EXAMPLE, PRIME MINISTER HAFIZULLAH AMIN RECENTLY TOLD A NEWS CORRESPONDENT THAT IF AFGHANISTAN WERE ATTACKED MILITARILY, THE SOVIET UNION WOULD "CERTAINLY" PROVIDE EVERY ASSISTANCE THAT IS NEEDED" (KABUL 6563). MANY LOCAL DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT MOSCOW HAS ALLOWED ITSELF TO BECOME THOROUGHLY AND OPENLY COMMITTED TO THIS STRUGGLE; THEREFORE, THE SOVIET UNION CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE THE WORLD SOCIALIST CAMP SEE IT FAIL TO PRESERVE A FELLOW MARXIST PARTY, THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF AFGHANISTAN (PDPA), AND A "PROGRESSIVE" REVOLUTION. OF COURSE, THE NATURE OF THE SOVIET COMMITMENT PROBABLY REMAINS SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE IN MOSCOW'S EYES.

12. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THE SOVIETS DO NOT EVEN FEEL THEMSELVES IRREVOCABLY COMMITTED TO THE PDPA, ITSELF. LOCAL SOVIET DIPLOMATS TAKE PAINS TO MAKE CLEAR THAT THEIR GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT IS LIMITED TO "SAVING THE REVOLUTION" AND TO THE PRESERVATION OF ITS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC GAINS (E. G., THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST ILLITERACY, THE ELIMINATION OF FEUDAL CONTROLS OVER WOMEN AND MARRIAGE, THE ABOLISHMENT OF USURY FOR AGRICULTURAL CREDIT, AND LAND REFORM). AS SOVIET OFFICIALS HAVE STATED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS: "THE CLOCK CANNOT BE TURNED BACK." THIS FORMULATION OF SOVIET VIEWS HAS BEEN TAKEN BY SOME OBSERVERS TO MEAN THAT THE USSR COULD LIVE WITH A NON-KHALQI SUCCESSOR REGIME WHICH WOULD UNDERTAKE TO PRESERVE THESE "PROGRESSIVE" GAINS. THE SOVIETS PROBABLY REALIZE THAT ALMOST ANY TYPE OF GOVERNMENT AT KABUL WOULD BE FORCED BY GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES TO MAINTAIN A PEACEFUL, STABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS GREAT, NORTHERN NEIGHBOR--BUT ADDITIONAL UNDERTAKING ON THE PART OF A NEW AFGHAN REGIME TO "PRESERVE THE FRUITS OF THE SAUR REVOLUTION" WOULD ALSO BE NECESSARY IN ORDER TO ALLOW THE USSR TO SAVE FACE SHOULD MOSCOW EVENTUALLY DECIDE THAT THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL COST OF KEEPING THE KHALQI REGIME PROPPED UP IS UNACCEPTABLY HIGH.

13. THE OUTLOOK FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE: ALTHOUGH IT WAS CLEAR IN RECENT WEEKS THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD HAVE PREFERRED SOME TYPE OF POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION WHICH WOULD HAVE REDUCED THE WIDESPREAD DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TO THE KHALQI REGIME, THERE NO LONGER APPEAR TO BE ANY IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS IN THAT AREA. A "BROADENING OF THE POLITICAL BASE" OF THE AFGHAN REGIME IS NOT POSSIBLE AS LONG AS THE KHALQIS PERSIST IN PURGING EVERY POSSIBLE ELEMENT OF COMPETITION--EVEN DISSIDENT KHALQI FACTIONS. AT ANY RATE, A RESHUFFLING OF CABINET PORTFOLIOS AMONG THE SAME, OLD, FAMILIAR "GODLESS," "PRO-RUSSIAN," MARXIST-LENINISTS DOWN IN KABUL IS NOT LIKELY TO IMPRESS THE THOUSANDS OF MUJAHEDDIN ("HOLY WARRIORS") UP IN THE HILLS WHO HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR MONTHS TO RESTORE AN ISLAMIC, NATIONALISTIC IDENTITY TO AFGHANISTAN.

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14. THE SOVIETS NOW APPEAR RESIGNED TO CONTINUING THEIR SUPPORT OF THE TARAKI-AMIN LEADERSHIP, BUT ON THEIR OWN TERMS. THE KHALQIS HAVE EVIDENTLY BEEN INSTRUCTED BY THE RUSSIANS TO TONE DOWN THOSE ASPECTS OF THEIR REVOLUTION WHICH AROUSE OPPOSITION. MARXIST-LENINIST RHETORIC HAS BECOME HERE MUTED. THE CONTROVERSIAL LAND-REFORM PROGRAM HAS BEEN DECLARED "COMPLETED." KHALQI LEADERS HAVE STRESSED THEIR IDENTIFICATION WITH ISLAM. THE SOVIETS AND THE KHALQIS ARE TRYING DESPERATELY TO BY TIME. IN A COUNTRY WHERE THE LIFE EXPECTANCY IS ONLY 40. THE COMMUNISTS KNOW THAT THE OLDER OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WILL EVENTUALLY DISAPPEAR FROM THE STAGE. THEY ARE PLACING THEIR HOPES ON THE YOUTH. THROUGH EXPERT, SOVIET-GUIDED INDOCTRINATION THROUGH THE MEDIA AND IN THE SCHOOLS, WE NOTE THAT KHALQISM MAY BE ACHIEVING SOME AFGAN YOUNG PEOPLE. ADDITIONALLY, AFGHAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ARE BEING SENT TO THE SOVIET UNION AND OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES FOR ADVANCED EDUCATION AND POLITICAL TRAINING (E.G., 1,500 RECENTLY LEFT FOR THE SOVIET UNION). MANY WILL RETURN AS INDOCTRINATED, VALUABLE CADRE--AND A FEW MIGHT RETURN AS EMBITTERED ANTI-SOVIETS.

15. THE MOST IMMEDIATE QUESTION IN THIS TIME-BUYING STRATEGY IS: HOW LONG CAN THE KHALQI REGIME HOLD OUT AGAINST A CONTINUOUS HEMORRHAGE OF ITS MANPOWER? MANY AFGHAN TROOPS ARE BEING LOST EVERY MONTH THROUGH BATTLEFIELD CASUALTIES, DESERTIONS, AND DEFECTION. THE LATTER CATEGORY INCLUDES UNITS OF UP TO BRIGADE STRENGTH WHICH HAVE CROSSED OVER TO THE REBEL SIDE WITH THEIR SOVIET-SUPPLIED WEAPONS--AND THE PROFESSIONAL SKILLS FOR USING THEM. AS NOTED EARLIER, THE USSR HAS

BEEN SUPPLYING A GENEROUS STREAM OF MILITARY HARDWARE--BUT THE MANPOWER SHORTAGE IS NOW BECOMING SO CRITICAL THAT THERE ARE FEW WELL TRAINED SOLDIERS TO MAN THIS EQUIPMENT UNLESS TANKS ARE PARKED THROUGHOUT AFGHANISTAN.

16. AT SOME POINT, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THE TAPAKI-AMIN LEADERSHIP MIGHT FEEL FORCED TO ASK FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. THE AFGHAN LEADERS WOULD PRESUMABLY CITE ARTICLE 4 OF THE NEW SOVIET-AFGHAN FRIENDSHIP TREATY OF DECEMBER 5, 1978. IT IS OUR BELIEF, HOWEVER, THAT THAT ARTICLE, OBVIOUSLY DRAFTED BY CLEVER SOVIET LAWYERS, DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY COMMIT THE USSR TO ARMED INTERVENTION. SHOULD MOSCOW ELECT TO STALL. (ON THE OTHER HAND, IT ALSO APPEARS TO AUTHORIZE SOVIET INTERVENTION, EVEN IN TIME OF PEACE.) MANY LOCAL DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS THINK THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD WANT TO AVOID SUCH INVOLVEMENT AS LONG AS ANY LESSER COURSE OF ACTION WAS STILL VIABLE--BUT DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE USSR MIGHT FEEL ITSELF FORCED TO DECIDE THAT IT WAS REQUIRED TO SEND IN TROOPS "TO SAVE THE REVOLUTION" AND A "FRATERNAL PARTY," IN SUCH A CASE, THE INITIAL SOVIET INVOLVEMENT COULD BE LIMITED: E.G., SPECIAL AIRBORNE FORCES "TO PROTECT INSTALLATIONS HOUSING SOVIET CITIZENS." EVENTUALLY, HOWEVER, THE SOVIET COMMITMENT WOULD PROBABLY EXPAND.

17. OTHER LOCAL DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS THINK THE SOVIETS WOULD, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, WITHHOLD COMBAT SUPPORT FROM THE KHALQI REGIME, JUDGING THAT THE ODDS FAVORED MOSCOW'S CHANCES OF BEING ABLE TO DO BUSINESS WITH ALMOST ANY TYPE OF SUCCESSOR REGIME. MOSCOW HAS PROBABLY NOTED THE STATEMENTS OF AFGHAN REBEL LEADERS AT PESHAWAR, SUCH AS SYED AHMED GAILANI, THAT THE LATTER ARE READY TO BE "PRACTICAL" ABOUT A FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH MOSCOW. THE SOVIETS MIGHT FEEL THAT THEY WOULD POSSESS THE LEVERAGE TO FORCE A SUCCESSOR REGIME TO HONOR THE "PROGRESSIVE ADVANCES" OF THE SAUR REVOLUTION, AND, IN THIS WAY, ALLOW SOME SAVING OF FACE..

18. IN THE JUDGMENT OF THIS EMPASSY, THE TIME HAS NOT YET ARRIVED FOR A KHALQI PLEA FOR HELP--NOR IS THERE YET ANY SOLID EVIDENCE THAT THE USSR IS POISING ITSELF FOR ARMED INTERVENTION IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. UNDOUBTEDLY, HOWEVER, THE USSR HAS PROBABLY BEEN MAKING GUNTINCENCY PLANS AND PREPARATIONS.

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